

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 01196

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, MT, US, IT
SUBJECT: MALTESE DISPLEASURE WITH ERIC DA-RIN

REF: VALLETTA 1169

1. CONTRETEMPS OVER ERIC DA-RIN AND FELICE MISSION HAS ENDED IN COMPROMISE OF SORTS BUT WITH CONSIDERABLE MINTOFF BACKDOWN. RESIDUE OF IRRITATION WITH MINTOFF IN GOI IS CONSIDERABLE.
2. DA-RIN ASSEMBLED FIVE NATO AMBASSADORS TODAY TO BRIEF US ON OUTCOME OF HIS WEKKEND CONSULTATIONS IN ROME OVER MINTOFF DEMAND FOR HIS RECALL. DA-RIN HAS RETURNED WITH FULL ACCREDITATION AS AMBASSADOR BUT WITH UNDERSTANDING HE WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO A LARGER POST SOME MONTHS HENCE.
3. THIS OUTCOME WAS NOT REACHED, HOWEVER, WITHOUT GOI HAVING TO STAND FIRM IN FACE OF SERIES OF MINTOFF DEMANDS CONCERNING DA-RIN. FIRST WAS THAT GOI RECALL HIM FOR COLLUSION WITH OPPOSITION AND THEREFORE UNACCEPTABLE AS AMBASSADOR. THIS GOI REJECTED FIRMLY,
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SAYING THAT IF MINTOFF PERSISTED GOI WOULD HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO PUT MALTESE/ITALIAN RELATIONS IN STATE OF FREEZE, INCLUDING SUSPENSION OF DIALOGUE ON MALTA POST-'79. MINTOFF THEN FELL BACK TO SUGGESTING DA-RIN BE CONTINUED AS AMBASSADOR BUT RESIDENT IN ROME. AFTER GOI'S REJECTION OF THIS GAMBIT MINTOFF SUGGESTED THAT DA-RIN COULD RETURN NOT AS AMBASSADOR BUT ONLY AS

SPECIAL EMISSARY IN CONNECTION WITH DIALOGUE.

4. PERMANENT UNDER SECRETARY Malfatti (who acted as GOI channel in telephone conversations with Attorney General Edgar Mizzi) rejected this as well, reminding Maltese that he was not a Manzini and had no particular brief for Malta, emphasizing that Italy was only prepared to discuss this as an issue between two sovereign and self-respecting governments.

5. End result is that Da-Rin has returned, with full confidence of GOI, but with GOI understanding with Maltese that he will depart several months hence at what will be seen as completion of normal tour of duty. Da-Rin tells us that present intention of GOI is to leave the post at charge level for some time thereafter.

6. Meanwhile Da-Rin will continue acting as Ambassador and conducting a normal relationship as far as GOI is concerned. This includes next round of talks between French/Italians and Maltese in Rome on May *8-*9 on neutrality guarantee. However Da-Rin emphasized that Maltese cannot expect him or the GOI to conduct day-to-day operations with much enthusiasm and that result will inevitably be some slowdown in activity.

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7. Da-Rin himself professes to have some mixed emotions about all this, regretful he will be departing under these circumstances but nonetheless glad to be free of what he claims to have become an onerous task. He says that he has Forlani's complete confidence (and Forlani's deepened dislike of Minto). He apparently also has Forlani's assurance (protect carefully) that he will be named Italy's next NATO Permrep when the present incumbent's tour of duty ends in January 1979. In anticipation of this he intends to depart Malta September 1, go on leave, and then join Italy's UNGA delegation late this year before going to Brussels.

8. Da-Rin continues to feel that he did nothing untoward in talking about the Felice visit to Washington in the way he did with Nationalist Deputy Leader Demarco. Consequently Department and Rome should carefully avoid using my term "indiscreet" in describing what he said to Demarco, even though I hold to that view. Meanwhile I have had no occasion to run into any of the opposition leadership which is fortunate since I still have

NO IDEA WHAT FELICE HAS IN FACT TOLD THEM. THE LEADER-
SHIP WILL NO DOUBT COMPLAIN TO ME THAT I HAVE NOT
DEALT WITH THEM IN CONFIDENCE, TO WHICH I INTEND TO SAY
THAT FELICE (AND MINTOFF) WANTED IT HANDLED IN THE WAY IT
WAS AND THAT IT IS UP TO FELICE TO DECIDE HOW TO TREAT
WITH HIS OWN LEADERSHIP. LAINGEN

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